

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

December 12, 2023

The Honorable Adrienne Adams
New York City Council Speaker
250 Broadway
New York City, NY

Dear City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams:

We are grateful for your leadership on the number of issues facing individuals and families throughout our communities, including your engagement in criminal justice reforms and your efforts to end solitary confinement by the New York City Department of Corrections. As Members of New York City's congressional delegation, we write today to express our strong support for swift action from the New York City Council, before the end of the Council's current term, to end the use of solitary confinement in our City's jails. It is our belief that the United States has a moral obligation to meet its foundational promise of guaranteed justice for all, including by ending the use of solitary confinement at all levels of government and by implementing safe and effective alternative strategies for confinement in its place.

In New York City's jails, as in jurisdictions across the nation, solitary confinement is known to impose severe suffering and deterioration on an individual's mental and physical well-being. Solitary confinement causes heart disease, anxiety, depression, psychosis, and self-mutilation. Prolonged exposure is directly linked to grave outcomes, including death—a fact which New York City's prisons are no stranger to. You know their cases and like us, you know their names – Erick Tavera, Layleen Polanco, Kalief Browder, Andy Henriquez, Bradley Ballard, Jason Echeverria, Brandon Rodriguez, and countless others have died because of solitary confinement in New York City's jails.^{[1](#)[2](#)[3](#)[4](#)[5](#)[6](#)[7](#)} As a direct result, the continued use of solitary confinement makes our City's jails *less* safe, especially for Black New Yorkers, who account for approximately 49% of the population in state prisons and 61% of those held in solitary confinement.^{[8](#)[9](#)}

Indeed, ending the torturous practice of solitary confinement need not be accompanied by any trade-offs in prison safety. Instead proven, results from alternate programs to solitary confinement—which utilize separation without isolation, in addition to out-of-cell congregate engagement and programming—have shown dramatic reductions in violence in both jails^{[10](#)} and outside communities,^{[11](#)} as well as reductions in instances of self-harm.^{[12](#)} Recent polling from Data for Progress also indicates that reforms to curtail or permanently end solitary confinement have broad public support.^{[13](#)} Thus, with both the public that we serve and the available science favoring the end of solitary confinement, we believe that now represents a unique moment in our history for all levels of government—federal, state, and local—to act together to end this harmful practice for good.

Our Congressional delegation last wrote to the New York City Council about the need to end solitary confinement in December of 2021. In the time since considerable progress has been made to advance justice on this matter, as in March 2022, the state of New York began its implementation of the all-important HALT Solitary Confinement Act, which limits solitary confinement in New York State prisons to 15 consecutive days

or 20 days within a 60-day period. This important law also banned the use of the practice for people with mental illness and for other vulnerable groups. However, recent lawsuits allege that the New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) is still finding loopholes in order to avoid complying with HALT's requirements,¹⁴ and a March 2023 comprehensive report by the Correctional Association of New York cited DOCCS's overall lack of adherence and failure to implement HALT's requirements as a major issue.¹⁵ In turn, New York City's prisoners are likely to continue to be subject to the tortuous practice of solitary confinement without additional action at all levels of government.

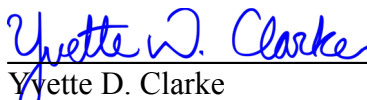
We strongly encourage the New York City Council to take advantage of its current historic opportunity and to act before the end of the Council's current term to end the torturous and deadly practice of solitary confinement in our City. In doing so, New York City has the opportunity to serve as a model for the rest of the nation and to act on the side of justice.

We appreciate your urgency on this critical matter, and we thank you for all of your work to help our City create a more equitable and just criminal justice system.

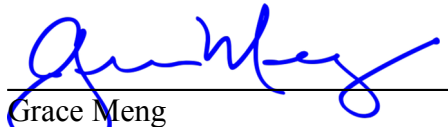
Sincerely,



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



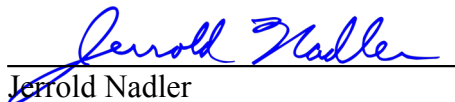
Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



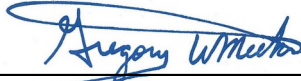
Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



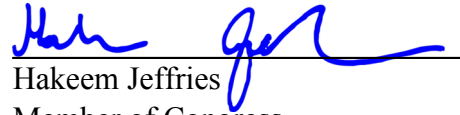
Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



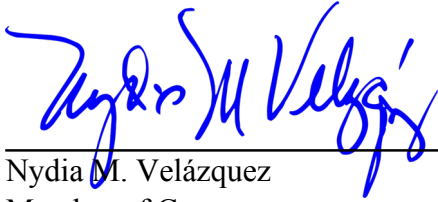
Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress



Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress